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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EC](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: ECUADORIAN CASUALTY IN ATTACK COMPLICATES
RELATIONS WITH COLOMBIA

REF: 07 QUITO 2398

Classified By: CDA Jefferson Brown for Reasons 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The GOC confirmation of an Ecuadorian casualty in the March 1 attack has raised bilateral tensions again between Ecuador and Colombia, and will likely delay any formal re-establishment of diplomatic relations. As the Correa administration continues its hard line with Colombia, the current dispute undermines the recent OAS-led rapprochement as well as progress in bilateral relations that had been made previous to March 1. In addition to requesting compensation for the death of the Ecuadorian in the March 1 attack, the GOE may demand compensation for damages caused by previous Colombian incursions into Ecuador, as well as for alleged damages from aerial eradication. But the Ecuadorian victim's apparent FARC links, if confirmed, could prove embarrassing and undermine the GOE stance. (End Summary)

¶2. (SBU) The parents of Ecuadorian Franklin Aisalia believe that their son was mistaken by Colombian authorities for Julian Conrado, senior FARC member and songwriter, during the March 1 attack. Late on March 24, the Ecuadorian Prosecutor General's office confirmed that the body is that of Aisalia, based on a comparison of fingerprints provided to Interpol. The parents of Aisalia told the press on March 25 that they do not plan to take legal action in the death of their son and ask only that his body be repatriated.

¶3. (SBU) 22 days after the break in diplomatic relations with Colombia, Ecuador is still pursuing a hard diplomatic line. President Correa announced during his weekly radio address on March 22 that Colombia must stop its "media campaign" against Ecuador before he will re-establish diplomatic relations. Correa also declared that he would launch a new diplomatic battle if the Ecuadorian body were that of Aisalia, and that "this would be a very serious case, as it would deal with the murder of an Ecuadorian on Ecuador soil, and we will not allow this precedent to go unpunished." Vice Foreign Minister Jose Valencia confirmed a report that the GOE was on the verge of presenting a request to the Colombian foreign ministry, demanding approximately \$1.2 million in compensation for damages caused by prior incursions of Colombian military into Ecuador.

¶4. (SBU) Responding to the March 23 statement by Colombian Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos that the body taken back to Colombia belonged to an Ecuadorian national, Correa conferred on March 24 with the Foreign Minister, Vice Foreign Minister, and the ministers of Government and Justice. Shortly thereafter, the GOE released an official statement

claiming that the death of Aisalia and the transport of his body to Colombia constituted human rights violations. The statement says that "Ecuador will appeal to the Secretary of the OAS to find a definitive solution to the case." The statement also reaffirms that the GOE does not approve of the use of violence by the FARC or other illegal groups, and that the military/police have been authorized by the President to impede the entry and take action against unlawful groups in national territory.

15. (SBU) As bilateral tensions continue, it is worth noting that prior to March 1, Ecuador-Colombian relations were at their best point in recent memory. In response to a letter received from the FARC in October 2007, the GOE issued an official statement that "Ecuador maintains diplomatic relations with the Colombian state and its legitimately constituted Government" (reftel). In January 2008, Ecuador refused to follow Chavez's lead in recognizing the FARC's belligerent status. On February 26, Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo sent a communique to Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Maria Isabel Salvador expressing interest in assisting Ecuadorians affected by aerial fumigations along the border with Colombia. President Uribe had extended an invitation to President Correa for an official visit immediately following the UNASUR summit meeting at the end of March (now postponed). The Ecuadorian military had improved its working level cooperation with the Colombian authorities on shared border operations. According to recently departed Ecuadorian Ambassador to Colombia Francisco Suescum, after rough times in previous years due to disputes over glyphosate spraying, "This barbaric attack threw to the ground all the advances that we had made."

16. (SBU) Comment: The GOE's hardline response to the death of Aisalia is a double-edged sword. Local media today is filled with photos and reports that appear to document his long-standing connections to the FARC, although his parents and neighbors offer a very different portrait. The Foreign Minister's response to the allegations is that "you can't fight one illegality with another," given that his death did not occur in the context of battle. But the FARC is widely unpopular in Ecuador, so if those connections are proven, it's unclear which way Ecuadorian public opinion and sympathies will go.
Brown